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Government
of Canada

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Brighter futures



Children
Matter

Canada



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Brighter futures

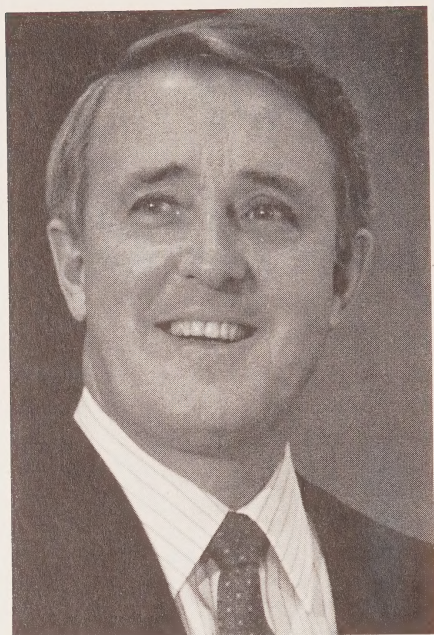
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Message from the Prime Minister

In September 1990, I had the distinct pleasure of serving as co-host of the World Summit for Children held at the United Nations. The leaders of 71 nations gathered to talk about the world's children. They spoke of their dreams for children in their countries and throughout the world. They departed with a determination to turn their words into actions.

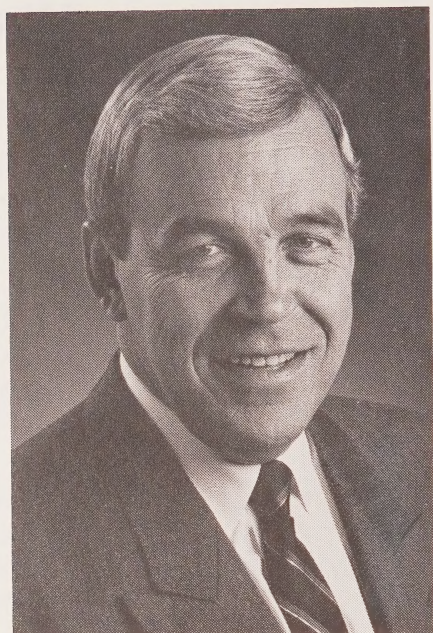
The World Summit was not in itself the answer to the problems facing children and parents. It was a catalyst to engage governments, organizations, parents and even children in activities to improve the lives of children in every country.

Brighter Futures is the response of the Government of Canada. It defines our priorities and charts our course. Above all, it makes clear that children, their parents and care givers are a key part of our national agenda.

To make a difference for our children, the federal government seeks the active participation of all Canadians. Through working partnerships that complement existing efforts at the federal, provincial and community levels, we can do it.

The world belongs to the children. Let us work together to ensure they inherit the brightest possible future.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Jean Chrétien". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a light blue color that matches the header text.



Message from the Minister of National Health and Welfare

As Canadians, we are fortunate to live in a country with such a high quality of life. We have much to be proud of and our children have a wealth of opportunities before them. And because our children are our future, we can say with confidence that we face a bright future.

But the future is not bright for all Canadian children. Many of our children live in conditions of risk. Over one million children find themselves in conditions that threaten their ability to develop into healthy, happy adults capable of making their contribution to society.

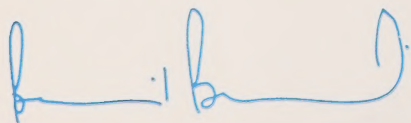
I have seen children at risk first-hand. I have seen the saddening results of growing up in conditions of risk: poor school performance; low self-esteem; developmental disabilities; chronic unemployment.

Conditions of risk exist in all parts of Canada: in rich and poor neighbourhoods, in our cities, in our Native communities and in our rural areas.

The time has come for all of us to work together to change this reality. I believe that by focusing our efforts, particularly on young children at risk, we can make a real difference.

I believe in four broad principles for addressing the problem of children at risk: Prevention, Promotion, Protection and Community Partnerships. Together, these are the building blocks of the Child Development Initiative, a part of Brighter Futures.

Brighter Futures is an invitation to all Canadians. It is an invitation to all who believe, as I do, that together we can make a real difference in the lives of our children.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "J. L. B.", is located at the bottom of the page.

Brighter Futures

**Ratification of the Convention
on the Rights of the Child**



Proposed Child Benefit



**Canada's Action Plan
for Children**



**The Child Development
Initiative**



What is Brighter Futures?

Brighter Futures is a series of steps toward achieving a better tomorrow for Canada's children.

On September 30, 1990, the leaders of 71 countries gathered at the United Nations for the World Summit for Children. At this Summit, co-chaired by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, the assembled world leaders committed their governments to act on behalf of the world's children.

In Canada, the first step was taken in December 1991, with the Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The second was taken in February 1992, with the proposed Child Benefit which was announced in the federal budget.

The third and fourth have been taken, with the publication of *Canada's Action Plan for Children* and the announcement of the Child Development Initiative.



Children at Risk

Children are considered to be “at risk” because of certain conditions of risk in which they live. These conditions of risk include: poverty, unhealthy living conditions, neglect and abuse.

In Canada today, it is estimated that over one million children live in conditions of risk. This figure includes children in low-income families, two-fifths of whom are being raised by a lone parent. It also includes children who are in physically, sexually or emotionally abusive situations as well as those at risk of developing health or developmental problems.



Canada's Action Plan provides a long-term framework that will guide Canadians toward creating brighter futures for our children.

The Child Development Initiative will contribute to reducing the conditions of risk in which many children find themselves. It is based on a partnership approach, involving all Canadians working together to make changes for our children.

These are two of the steps taken so far as part of Brighter Futures. They are enduring, long-term initiatives which lay the groundwork for additional actions as we move toward our goal.

But Brighter Futures is much more than federal government initiatives. It is an invitation — a call to action — to all Canadians to become more aware and more involved in the lives of our children.

Brighter Futures is an expression of optimism and hope, as the children themselves are our expression of confidence and optimism for the future. But Brighter Futures is also firmly grounded in reality. The Government of Canada believes that it is essential that our children inherit a Canada that is strong and full of opportunities.

While we must work to improve the conditions and prospects for all children, we must also focus our efforts on those at greatest risk and with the highest need.

Above all, Brighter Futures is about working together over the long term on behalf of our children. Brighter Futures honours and extols the work of parents; no one knows better how to raise children than parents. But our governments, voluntary organizations, businesses and unions together all contribute to creating the communities that support children and their parents. Ultimately, our success in meeting the needs of children at risk will be a measure of our commitment to improving the lives of all children and a measure of our success as a caring nation.



Canada and the World's Children

In 1990-91, Canada provided about \$350 million in Official Development Assistance (ODA) for activities related to children.

Since 1985, Canada has played a leading role in the International Immunization Program in ensuring that more than 8 million of the world's children have been vaccinated. Over the next five years, Canada will spend \$50 million for immunization programs.

In 1991, Canada created the Fund for Children in Difficult Circumstances to promote a better environment for children from developing countries who are abused, such as street children, child labourers and child prostitutes.

Per capita, Canada is the world's largest food aid donor and has played a leading role in addressing micronutrient malnutrition.



STEP ONE

Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified by Canada on December 11, 1991. It provides us with a set of standards that confirms the respect that our society gives its youngest members. It is an illustration of Canadians' belief that our children, indeed the world's children, matter.



STEP TWO

The Proposed Child Benefit

The proposed Child Benefit is a better, more generous way of helping parents. It is proposed to come into effect in January 1993 and will provide higher benefits to low-income working families with children.

The proposed Child Benefit will consolidate the existing Family Allowances, the refundable Child Tax Credit and the non-refundable Dependent Child Tax Credit into a single monthly payment. It will include an additional amount for low-income working families. It builds on existing federal programs for children and families and it complements the roles of provincial and territorial governments and other organizations.

The proposed Child Benefit represents an increase of \$2.1 billion in federal government support for children and families over the next five years.



STEP THREE

Canada's Action Plan for Children

Canada's Action Plan for Children is a blueprint for the federal government's actions to support children and families in Canada and around the world. The Government of Canada calls on all sectors — families, other governments, non-government organizations, business, labour and others — to join these efforts to meet the challenges that our children and families will face in the years to come. By working together, we will be able to build a stronger society, in which all of us have a stake in ensuring that no child is at risk. Ultimately, our strength as a nation is reflected in our care for those who are most vulnerable. It is up to us to create brighter futures for children.



Pathways to Adulthood

In recent years, a body of research on child development has changed the focus of social policy for children from one of attempting to solve problems once they have disrupted a child's life to one of anticipating and preventing them through timely intervention.

Increasingly, there is an understanding of the "pathways" that lead to problems in later life and the influences that protect or buffer children.

Positive influences include: healthy pregnancies and birth weights, loving parents knowledgeable about child development, caring families and supportive communities.

Fortunately, most Canadian children find themselves on these healthy pathways, which accounts for the positive health and development of the vast majority of Canadian children.

For those at potential risk — on dangerous pathways — life can be made better through thoughtful and timely interventions.

Relatively simple and early interventions that are targeted can help a child move from a dangerous pathway to a healthy pathway. Children, who otherwise could become a burden on society and unfulfilled in their own adulthood, can grow to be happy, healthy, well-adjusted adults.

An effort directed at children at risk, which is substantial, sustained and based on the growing body of child development research, can help ensure that future generations of children will not experience the same degree of physical, mental and social problems that a considerable number are experiencing today.



STEP FOUR

The Child Development Initiative

What Is It?

A group of long-term programs designed to address conditions of risk during the earliest years in a child's life.

The programs operate on four guiding principles:

- Prevention
- Promotion
- Protection
- Partnership

The \$500-million funding for the Child Development Initiative is supplied by the federal government. The programs complement existing federal, provincial and community initiatives.

The programs will be administered in close partnership with the provinces, territories, First Nations, communities and non-government organizations.

Why?

To promote the health and well-being of children at risk.

Who Is It Intended For?

At-risk children 0-6 years of age and their parents.

Pregnant women and nursing mothers.

All families in Canada.



Child Health

Low birth weight is a determining factor in about two thirds of all deaths among newborns. It is caused by such factors as poor nutrition before and during pregnancy and use of tobacco, alcohol or drugs during pregnancy.

In all other age ranges, injuries are the leading cause of death, followed by cancer and, for adolescents, suicide.



Prevention

What Is It?

Programs designed to obtain better information on causes of childhood illness, injury and death.

Why?

Because prevention is better than repair.

Because we can solve most problems by intervening early and reducing their occurrence.

Because we need better information on the causes of childhood illnesses, injuries and death.

Examples

Develop national guidelines on children's nutrition.

Develop recommendations, goals and strategies in the areas of injury prevention, immunization, nutrition, child health and child mental health.

Improve prevention and treatment strategies for communicable childhood illnesses and non-communicable diseases.





Promotion

What Is It?

Programs designed to improve the health and well-being of children by providing information on the care and nurturing of children.

Programs to promote the value of children and parenting by society as a whole.

Why?

Because parents want and need the best possible information.

Because we need to help build a consensus among all Canadians that by working together — and only by working together — we can realize brighter futures for our children.

Examples

Develop and distribute to expectant parents educational materials focused on reducing the incidence of low birth weight babies and ensuring the growth of healthy babies.

Provide Native-focused resource materials to parents in First Nations communities.

Provide information to encourage breast-feeding.

Reduce the incidence of childhood injuries by providing parents, children, non-government organizations and professionals with information they can use to safeguard children.

Provide teaching materials for young schoolchildren to help ensure a better understanding of food-borne illness and its prevention.





Protection

What Is It?

Programs that complement existing federal initiatives to protect children from threats to their well-being.

Why?

Because children are vulnerable and need to be protected.

Because one of the measures of a successful society is how it cares for its children.

Examples

Build up the RCMP Missing Children's Registry.

Help provincial and territorial governments develop new and more effective methods of ensuring Family Support payments are upheld.

Reduce inappropriate drug use by improving the labelling of prescription and non-prescription drugs for children.



Indian Children

The infant mortality rate for registered Indians is more than double the average Canadian rate.

The rate of death due to injuries for registered Indian pre-school aged children is six times higher than the national rate.

The rate of suicide among registered Indian adolescents is seven times the national rate.

The rate of poverty in Native communities is more than twice that of the national rate.

Education levels are improving, but more than one third of registered Indians have less than a Grade 9 education, almost double the proportion of the Canadian population.



Partnership (Community Action for Children)

What Is It?

Support for local groups in their delivery of health and social programming to high-risk children 0-6 years of age.

Programs to help on-reserve Indian and Inuit communities deal with problems affecting Native children and families.

Community-based programs based on negotiations with provinces and territories.

Why?

Because the federal government can provide funding contributions and communities can best reach children directly.

Because Native communities know Native communities best.

Examples

Low birth weight clinics in communities across Canada.

Improve knowledge and skills of community workers.

Help on-reserve Indian and Inuit communities with pre-school child development and with mental health problems affecting Native children and families.



Working Together

Working together begins with a recognition by all Canadians that a national effort on behalf of our children is the sum of the individual efforts of each and every one of us. Only by working together can we ensure that our children have the brighter futures they deserve.

Working together on behalf of our children can take many forms. Some examples of how we can all become involved include:

Participating in the work of a voluntary organization.

Becoming a neighbourhood parent.

Helping to establish a toy lending library in your community.

Giving a single parent a break.

Volunteering at a children's hospital.

Together We Can Do It.



